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GERMAN LITERATURE.

Goethe's Poems, selected and edited with introduction and notes by JULIUS GOEBEL, Professor of Germanic Philology and Literature in Stanford University. New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1901; 8vo., xix, 239 pp.

The world's interest in Goethe centers around his marvelous personality. While there has hardly ever been much discussion as to his poetical genius, his admirers as well as his detractors have always concerned themselves with the author's person, deprecating it, as did Ludwig Boerne, or praising it as the highest incarnation of modern wisdom.

Goethe himself has offered an explanation for this curious fact by calling all his writings fragments of an enormous confession. Thus it appears that a thorough knowledge of this personality is necessary for the student of Goethe's works. He not only finds in it the most complete and authoritative commentary of these "occasional poems"; but he is also enabled to link these "fragmentary" writings into one great unit, assigning to each of them its proper place and relative value.

It was therefore an excellent idea of Professor Goebel to give in his edition of Goethe's poems not merely one more reprint of the best or the most popular ones among them, but to show by their chronological arrangement and in his notes "as far as possible the inner development of the poet and the man."

The first part of this task is to depict in short and clear outlines the essential traits in Goethe's character and to follow their development through the different periods of his life. The general introduction of the volume, special introductions to the different chapters and the larger part of the notes are devoted to its fulfilment.

It must be said that Professor Goebel is particularly successful in this representation of Goethe's personality. While stating Goethe's moral and religious views and defining his general attitude toward life, he has laid stress upon one trait, which is so often overlooked and which yet is the very basis of Goethe's character as a man and as a poet: his essential manliness, his "buoyant health," which, combined with his deep-rooted optimism, made him one of the earliest advocates of what is now styled the "strenuous life." People have too much thought of Goethe as the author of Werther

and have taken him for either a morbid sentimentalist or a complacent "esthete." They have forgotten that Goethe as prime minister of the Duchy of Sachsen-Weimar was in constant touch with real active life and they have failed to see that the final conclusions of his philosophy of life always emphasize the paramount value of self-control and of useful activity. The author of *Faust* held it, "that the supreme duty and privilege of men lies in moral action, in working toward a realization of the world-purpose, not for our own enjoyment but for the well-being of our fellow-men."¹ No matter how much Goethe in his own life succeeded in this "realization of what is morally good"²—and he himself was always ready to acknowledge his shortcomings—the *leitmotif*, everywhere to be found in his writings and in the moral struggles of his career, is this endeavor to attain self-control and to be useful to others. And it is by no means an accident of chance, if President Roosevelt in his recent volume, *The Strenuous Life: Essays and addresses*,³ quotes on the title page Faust's words:

"Ja diesem Sinne bin ich ganz ergeben,
Das ist der Weisheit letzter Schluss:
Nur der verdient sich Freiheit wie das Leben,
Der täglich sie erobern muss.
Und so verbringt, umrungen von Gefahr,
Hier Kindheit, Mann und Greis sein tüchtig Jahr.
Solch ein Gewimmel möcht' ich sehn,
Auf freiem Grund mit freiem Volke stehn."

After having stated this conception of Goethe's character, Prof. Goebel follows its evolution in the lines introducing the various sections of the volume. Thus in the first chapter, inscribed "Leipzig," we perceive the immature frivolity of the young student and in "Sesenheim" we witness the famous tragic idyl. In "Sturm und Drang" we see how Goethe first imagined an ideal, consisting chiefly of "freedom from rules and regulations not only in art, but also in every sphere of life, originality and self-life"⁴ and how he soon recanted these illusions, how he "retreated from its titanic heights," realizing the "limitations of true humanity."⁵ The following section, "Rom," sketches Goethe's attitude towards classical antiquity, and in section v, "Lieder und Balladen," the editor, departing somewhat from his general plan, gives "a kind of lyric intermezzo, containing the most perfect specimens of

¹ Introduction, p. xviii.

² P. vii.

³ New York, 1901.

⁴ P. 21.

⁵ P. 22.

Goethe's lyric art."¹ The last two sections, "West-östlicher Divan" and "Alter," contain poems representative of Goethe's most mature thought.

This sketch of Goethe's evolution is illustrated by a selection of poems. The *embarras de richesse* of Goethe's lyrics made it necessary to leave out some masterpieces, even at the risk of not satisfying everybody. Thus one is sorry to miss such characteristic pieces as "Feiger Gedanken bängliches Schwanken," "Die Lustigen von Weimar," the "Hochzeittlied," "Der Todtentanz," and others; yet it is hard to say which poems the editor might have omitted in order to have room for those just quoted. On the whole the poems selected constitute a forcible and complete illustration of Goethe's life and thought.

These difficulties of selection are still more bewildering if one considers the number of commentaries which several decades of *Goethe-Philologie* have accumulated and from which the editor had to draw for his notes. He has shown wise discretion by not rehearsing all or most interpretations of the poems. In the main he has satisfied himself by stating tersely when and on what occasion they were written and has devoted considerable space to notes in which he demonstrates how far and in what respect the annotated passages are characteristic of Goethe's *Weltanschauung*. Here and there a fuller interpretation of obscure verses might have been desirable. For instance, in "Wanderers Sturmlied," terms like "die wollen Flügel" (verse 19) should be explained in the notes.

It would enhance the usefulness of the volume if the table of contents referred also to the pages where the notes are to be found, or if in the notes the pages were quoted on which the annotated poems are printed.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

To the Editors of Mod. Lang. Notes.

SIRS:—Allow me a short rejoinder to a part of Professor Ramsey's review of my Spanish Grammar, which does me an injustice not warranted by the facts.

At the foot of column 508 he says:

¹ P. 193.

"In the Reading Exercises. . . . Dr. Garner has essayed something decidedly novel. He commences with five *Escenas Sociales*, composed by himself, and intended to present, in simpler language than that found in any Spanish original, a series of dialogues that shall have the true colloquial ring."

I admit that this proceeding is a decidedly novel one, as I know of no grammar-maker who has attempted to present in this way a review of the syntactical work which the student is supposed to have already accomplished at this point. In my preface, which Professor Ramsey seems not to have carefully read, I stated that this was my chief aim in composing these dialogues, the other being to give a reading exercise in very simple conversational style.

It has been the almost universal custom of the makers of modern language readers to simplify the text presented in order to smooth a little the way for the novice. Professor Ramsey has done the same thing himself in his very excellent little Spanish Reader, saying, in his preface, that his first pieces are the easiest he could find after several years of patient searching but that even some of these had to be simplified to adapt them to the requirements of the beginner. This, to a certain extent, must deprive such texts of their true native flavor, if not of their "true colloquial ring." It is pertinent, therefore, to ask: which is the greater crime, if crime it be, to compose one's own matter in order to secure exactly what one wants, or to take the work of others and tamper with it? I will leave the impartial reader to answer this question.

As to the "true colloquial ring," I laid no special claim to having attained it in my *Escenas*, but judging from the compliment an educated Spanish gentleman paid me, namely, that they were so well written that they might be played before a Spanish audience, and it would never be suspected they were written by a foreigner, it may be inferred that they are not altogether a failure in this respect, even though the statement be discounted a little on the score of Castilian politeness.

Another remark in this same paragraph contains such a decided slur on this portion of my work that I cannot allow it to pass without notice, for fear the uninitiated may be led to believe that my dialogues are full of errors. Professor Ramsey cites from the first two pages three expressions as incorrect; namely, *pienso que no* (for *creo que no*), *excelentemente bien* (for *enteramente bien*) and *para decirlo así* (for *por decirlo así*).